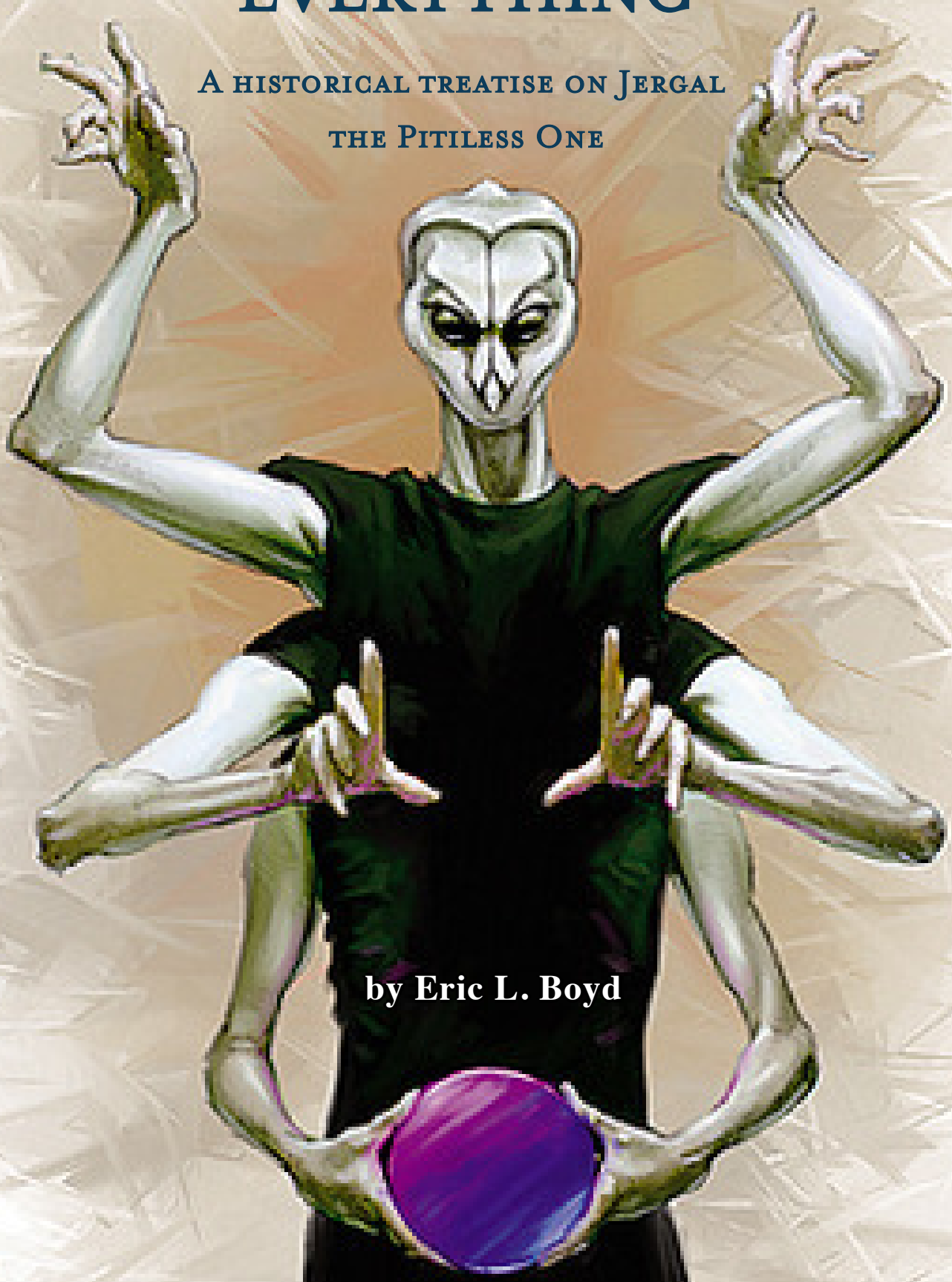
GUILD

FORGOTTEN REALMS

LORD OF THE END OF EVERYTHING

A historical treatise on Jergal the Pitiless One



by Eric L. Boyd

Lord of the End of Everything

Spell weavers are a race of enigmatic spellcasters whose empire once spanned the multiverse. During the Time of Nodes, spell weaver colonies (called Nodes) consisted of huge five-sided pyramids of stone and steel connected through a complex matrix of magical portals.

Each node consisted of a main pyramid more than 500 feet tall, atop which perched a great crystal lamp capable of illuminating the surrounding landscape with a pulsing azure light. Within each node was a breeding chamber, which contained the magic cylinders necessary for spell weavers to reproduce, a mortuary, in which spell weavers entered a stasis every six centuries in order to rejuvenate themselves, and a gigantic magical furnace, capable of creating epic magical effects on par with the powers of a deity. A ring of lesser pyramids surrounded most nodes, serving as living quarters for these enigmatic beings and libraries for their tablets inscribed with hieroglyphics.

Usually there was but one such node per world, from which the spell weavers observed the myriad cultures that surrounded them. Spell weavers only occasionally subjugated more primitive creatures to carry out menial chores and hard labor. The few races they encountered that posed a threat to the spell weaver's empire were given powerful magical items and artifacts, allowing those cultures to destroy themselves from within.

The spell weaver empire crumbled in an instant during an event known as the Disjunction, when they attempted to elevate the entire race to the ranks of the divine. This failed ascension sparked a magical backlash that rippled through the multiverse, causing the gigantic magical furnace of each Node to explode and obliterated the pyramidal colonies and all their inhabitants within seconds. Only the few members of the race who were away from the Nodes survived, becoming the ancestors of all modern spell weavers and beginning the age known to spell weavers as the Scrabbling.

In the Realms, there existed a spell weaver colony, known as Eril, in the northern reaches of Faerûn at the base of a cliff on the northwestern shores of the Narrow Sea (Modern: Ascore) with ready access to a nearby gem mine. From this redoubt, the spell weavers observed the empires of elves and dwarves, attended by a tribe of primitive humans, who they bred, selecting for their potential mastery of the Art.

In -3939 DR, the Disjunction destroyed Faerûn's spell weaver Node in a great conflagration, wiping out every spell weaver save one, a spell weaver named Jergal who was being birthed at the time. Although he possessed the entirety of his parent's memories, Jergal found himself alone in this new world: all his fellow spell weavers were dead and the primitive humans they had long kept as servitors and bred for their potential in the Art had fled down the shores of the Narrow Sea. And yet, Jergal found within himself a spark of divinity, suggesting that at least in some way, the Ascension had succeeded.

As had been long planned by the spell weaver race, Jergal set himself on a course to rebuild the spell weaver empire by reassembling the Code of Reversion, psychometrically inscribed in precious gemstones by the spell weavers before the Disjunction as a safety measure to allow them to repeat the experiment if something went wrong. The Code of Reversion was designed to allow a single spell weaver to cast a multi-part spell to reverse time in the entire multiverse to just before the Disjunction and then improve upon the experiment that attempted the mass divine ascension of the race. Unfortunately, Jergal realized the devastation caused by the first attempt was so great that the gemstones in which the Code of Reversion was inscribed were scattered across the multiverse in the conflagration.

Alone and bereft of allies, Jergal began his monumental task of restoring the Time of Nodes. Given the divine spark within him and the loss of the Code of Reversion, he decided to create a cult of worshipers and use them to create an army of undead. The undead —undying, able to operate in any environment without sustenance, and controllable—would then be able to scour the multiverse for the lost lore needed to reverse time.

Jergal began by nurturing a cult of worshipers led by shamans among the descendants of the spell weavers' former human servitors, who dwelled in small fishing villages on the shore of the Narrow Sea. Many of these humans were receptive to venerating Jergal as the Lord of the End of Everything (a title that ironically referred to the Code of Reversion), given their long cultural heritage of serving spell weaver masters. As the cult's worship nurtured Jergal's divine spark, shamans of Jergal rose to power in each village thanks to their power over life and death and their mastery of necromancy. Jergal then began inciting (through telepathic whispers) the orc tribes of the region to attack his followers. As he had planned, the human villages came together in mutual defense in -3859 DR against the orcs of the Horde Unending to form the Alliance of Seventon under the leadership of a shaman-king, Nether the Elder. As he grew in power, the shaman-king renamed the fledgling kingdom "Netheril," which meant "Nether's Land."

Once Netheril was established, Jergal's shamans began to teach promising Netherese the Art of necromancy and turn their energy towards creating a vast army of undead. However, the machinations of the Lord of the End of Everything did not go unnoticed, and the history of Netheril began to evolve beyond Jergal's control due to the influence of outside powers: the Fair Folk of Eaerlann and the lich-king of Oreme.

The emergence of a human culture skilled in the Art and focused on the necromantic arts just beyond the borders of Eaerlann became a growing concern for Durnal Corym Skyflower and the Caerilcarn. On the durnal's orders, Eaerlanni diviners began to discretely observe the Netherese in -3845 DR. By -3830 DR, after extensive debate amongst the Caerilcarn, Corym decided to the best course of action to counter the cult of Jergal was to provide the Netherese with an alternative approach to the study of magic, so he directed the wizards of Glaurachyndaar to begin tutoring promising Netherese students in the Art. With new avenues to the study of magic now open to the Netherese, the cult of Jergal began to recede in influence, with necromancy reduced to being one of nine strands of a larger spellcasting tradition.

After decades of growing interference in his plans by the Fair Folk, the incipient god of the dead turned his attention to eliminating the Fair Folk as a threat to his machinations. Using the same tactics he had employed to bring Netheril together in the first place, Jergal incited the Skullsworn orc horde to sweep down out of the Spine of the World to overrun Illefarn and Eaerlann in -3,655 DR. However, this manipulation backfired after the Fair Folk worked in conjunction with the humans of Netheril to turn back the threat, further cementing their alliance.

Frustrated, Jergal turned to the traditional tactics of his race and attempted to lure the Eaerlanni elves into destruction by tempting them with powerful new magic. In -3654 DR, after bypassing the wards of the arakhor (Modern: Grandfather Tree) that guarded the mist-shrouded halls of the Ba'etith, Jergal stole the Golden Skins of the World Serpent (Modern: Nether Scrolls) and hid them amidst the ruins of Aryvandaar (specifically the fourth Dlardrageth Armory, after creating a weakness in the wards cloaking the fourth Dlardrageth Armory through the Border Ethereal). Jergal's intent was to sow the seeds of Eaerlann's destruction by deceiving those who sought to reclaim the ancient magics of the Vyshaantar Empire into discovering these legendary artifacts and the secrets they held within them, leaving him free to manipulate the Netherese as he pleased.

However, this too caused more problems for the Lord of the End of Everything than planned. Jergal's theft did not go unnoticed by Issarnathass, the sarrukh lich-king taking his turn on the throne of Isstosseffifil within the Crypts of Oreme, who was alerted by ancient warding magics he had laid millennia before within the Hall of Mists. After observing the manipulations of the Netherese by both Jergal and the elves of Eaerlann as well as the potential held by the Netherese for mastery of the Art, Issarnathass decided to manipulate the humans to his own purposes, distinct from that of Jergal or the Fair Folk.

In the guise of a human archwizard named Arthindol, Issarnathass revealed himself to the Netherese and began instructing them in a new spellcasting tradition. The Netherese called Arthindol "the Terraseer" for his power to see events all over the world. Through his tutelage, the sarrukh lich-king sought to differentiate Netherese study of the Art from that of the Fair Folk, in hopes of learning new things from a different magical tradition that might be shaped later into weapons against the phaerimm.

Meanwhile, Jergal began to whisper to the elven wizards of Glaurachyndaar, tempting them with hints of powerful magic lost with the fall of Aryvandaar. Such efforts bore little immediate fruit among the Fair Folk, for the lessons of the Vyshaantar Empire still remained strong in the Eaerlanni tradition of magic. However, they did catch the interest of a Netherese apprentice studying in the City of Scrolls, Nargault "Finder" Etharr, who began secretly exploring the ruins of Aryvandaar on his own. Nargault's efforts in turn attracted the interest of Issarnathass, who, in the guise of the mysterious Terraseer, gave him a serpentskin tome to aid in his explorations.

In -3533 DR, with the aid of secrets gleaned from the tome, Nargault finally managed to reach the fourth Dlardrageth Armory and recover what would come to be known as the Nether Scrolls, thus sowing the seeds of Netheril's eventual destruction, as the Lord of the End of Everything had once intended for the Fair Folk of Eaerlann. With his original plan to recover the Code of Reversion in ruins, Jergal turned away from direct manipulation of the Netherese and embraced his divinity as their Lord of the Dead, while allowing the Terraseer to manipulate the evolution of the Art of the Netherese, largely unchallenged by the Lord of the End of Everything.

While Jergal did not abandon his efforts to recover the Code of Reversion, such efforts moved beyond the ken of mortals and took centuries to unfold. However, the seeds Jergal had sown as a spell weaver, coupled with the separate machinations of the Fair Folk and Issarnathass, led the Netherese to amazing heights of magic. Even the legendary mythallar of the Netherese owe their inspiration to the gigantic magical furnaces of spell weaver Nodes.

Interlude: The Crown of Horns

The *Crown of Horns* is a legendary artifact dating back to the waning years of the Silver Age of Netheril. During the course of its millennia -long existence, it has existed in at least four incarnations, has served the fell desires of at least two gods, and has been shattered and reformed into vessel for Myrkul's lingering divinity.

In its original form, the *Crown of Horns* was an electrum helm fully covered with small horns with a row of black gems around its edge. After it was shattered by Khelben Arusun and reformed by Myrkul, it became an electrum circlet with four bone horns mounted around its edge and one large obsidian-hued, translucent diamond centered over the wearer's brow and alive with energy.

For most of its existence (-2237 DR to 1358 DR), the crown's powers included sowing discord among those in its immediate vicinity who did not worship Jergal (later Myrkul) while causing them to covet the crown. All who wore the crown were gripped with madness and then gradually transformed into a lich. In addition, the crown had a ray of undeath power and some method of cursing those who opposed Jergal's (later Myrkul's) will by binding their name to daemons of the Lower Planes.

The symbol of Jergal

Crafting of the Crown

In –2237 DR, drawing on the knowledge contained within the Nether Scrolls, the Netherese archwizard Trebbe, ruler of the Netherese Enclave of Aquessir (Shadowtop Borough) attempted to create a crown that would give him the powers of lichdom when worn, without needing to become undead.

His hubris offended Jergal, Lord of the End of Everything, and the unfinished crown exploded, killing Trebbe. Jergal then reformed the crown, with powers more pleasing to him, and hid what would become known as the *Crown of Horns* in the upper halls of the fourth Dlardrageth armory with the hope that it might at last prove the undoing of the Fair Folk of Eaerlann.

In –1493 DR, while tracing the escape route of Netheril's former gnome slaves, with the aid of a serpentskin tome once owned by Nargault "Finder" Etharr, the Netherese archwizard Requiar discovered and donned the *Crown of Horns* in the fourth Dlardrageth armory. After transforming thirty of his fellow arcanists into liches under his control, he seized control of the Netherese enclave of Aquessir and focused its surviving resident archwizards on the necromantic arts to the morbid amusement of the Lord of the End of Everything.

By –1208 DR, Requiar had succumbed to madness and was overthrown by his undead apprentices. The *Crown of Horns* mysteriously disappeared in the chaos, and frantic searches for it within the enclave of Aquessir and the forests below proved fruitless.

In the Year of Vacant Wharves (–644 DR), Shadelorn, a Netherese archwizard, located the *Crown of Horns* near the southern edge of Rystallar, known to most historians as Rystall Wood, in a sinkhole filled with bones. He established a secret citadel beneath the site in which to research the artifact's powers, in hopes it would allow him to create a more powerful *mythallar* (the magic that powers the Netherese enclaves).

After three centuries of research (and passage into lichdom), Shadelorn returned in triumph to Aquessir, bearing the *Crown of Horns*, in the Year of Sovereign Truth (-342 DR). Driven mad by the crown, the undead wizard activated his improved *mythallar* to disastrous effect: all magic within a 20-mile radius failed, ending his own unlife and the lives of countless other Netherese archwizards who relied on magic to keep them alive. The failure of Aquessir's *mythallar* caused the entire enclave to crash into the Janick River. By the cruel hand of Tyche, Shadelorn's "triumph" managed to kill another Netherese archwizard, Shenandra, just as she had deduced a method for stopping the phaerimm, the ultimate goal of the Terraseer's millennia-long manipulation of the Netherese. The *Crown of Horns* vanished once again, and the opportunity to stop the phaerimm and save Netheril was lost.

Claws of Arlochar

In the Year of Old Crowns (-91 DR), as the Church of Myrkul gradually subsumed the Church of Jergal, the *Crown of Horns* was recovered from the spreading sands of Anauroch north of Hlondath by a cabal of Asrami necromancers from Orolin, City of Magicians, who called themselves the Claws of Arlochar. They then established the Citadel of Shadelorn on the southern edge of the Rystall Woods (Modern: Border Forest) in the depths of the archwizard's former lair.

In the Year of Leather Shields (-75 DR), descendants of fallen Netheril established the kingdom of Teshar in the cleared lands between Rystall Wood and Cormanthor. In the years that followed, under the malignant influence of the Claws of Arlochar, the cult of Myrkul took root among the more decadent nobles of that realm.

In the Year of the Fallen Temple (164 DR), the cult of Moander seized power in the city of Yûlash, located to the east of Teshar south of the River Tesh. After banishing the worship of all other gods, including the Lord of Bones, the cult began offering a steady stream of living sacrifices to the Jawed God.

At the urging of powerful noble houses with designs on the Moonsea, King Daelern I of Teshar marched east at the head of a large host, intent on destroying the cult of Moander and extending Teshar's border to the mouth of the River Tesh. After a disastrous initial battle, during which Teshar's army was all but destroyed, the desperate king acquiesced to the Claws of Arlochar, who offered to animate the fallen warriors of Teshar into an army of undead.

Teshar claimed a brief, hollow victory after its undead warriors sacked the temple of Moander, but the high priest of the Jawed God succeeded in summoning an avatar of Moander to the Realms, who then engulfed Teshar's army of undead. With the city in ruins, Teshar abandoned its thoughts of conquest, but the royal family now found itself dependent on the cult of Myrkul to maintain its authority. Banishing the Jawed God from the Realms was left to the elves of Cormanthyr, who, after a two-year siege ending in the Year of Unkind Weapons (171 DR), entombed the god's physical form in Moander's Crypt in the catacombs beneath the ruined city.

By the Year of Murmuring Dead (183 DR), the cult of Myrkul had grown so strong in Teshar that undead were openly seen walking in the streets of Teshar's capital and the Claws of Arlochar served as chief advisors to the throne. Midwinter's eve saw the coronation of King Daelern II, with the *Crown of Horns* being adopted as Teshar's royal crown. During the ceremony, Prince Etharn revealed himself to be a paladin of Lathander and slew his elder brother ere he could issue his first decree, but one of the necromancers fled with the crown of horns before the prince could attempt to destroy it. Inspired by Prince Etharn's heroism, the people of Teshar rose up in rebellion against the undead in their midst, and then Prince Etharn led the Army of the Morninglord in an assault on the Citadel of Shadelorn. By the end of the year, King Etharn ruled the Realm of Dawn, necromancy was outlawed throughout the realm and its practitioners banished, and the surviving Claws of Arlochar had been killed or fled into exile, with the *Crown of Horns* in hand.

Unbeknownst to King Etharn or the people of Teshar, the secretive cabal of necromancers quickly established a new lair in the catacombs beneath Moander's Crypt located beneath the ruins of Yûlash. Cloaked from detection by the ancient spells of the Fair Folk that bound the Jawed God within the temple, the Claws of Arlochar began to plot their revenge. In the centuries that followed, one-by-one Teshar's banished necromancers embraced lichdom with the aid of the *Crown of Horns*.

In the Year of Forestsfrost (479 DR), the Claws of Arlochar finally exacted their vengeance against the heirs of King Etharn. With agents placed in key positions throughout Teshar's military, the Claws precipitated a series of skirmishes between Teshar's border guards and the drow of Arkalulamr (Modern: The Twisted Tower of Shadowdale). The drow responded in kind with a series of raids and assaults, while the liches ensured that Teshar's armies crumbled from within.

The fall of the Realm of Dawn prompted Aubayreer Mindosel of Teshar, apprentice of Agannazar at the School of Wizardry in Neverwinter, to return to the Inner Sea Lands to exact his revenge against the drow who had destroyed his homeland. Upon his arrival in Myth Drannor, Aubayreer joined the Incanistaeum, the school of wizardry led by the Seven Wizards, under the tutelage of Mentor Wintercloak and set about plotting the fall of the Twisted Tower.

In the Year of the Flame Tongue (500 DR), Josidiah Starym of Myth Drannor led an attack on the drow of the Twisted Tower, after years of planning by Aubayreer Mindosel. During the sacking of the tower, Aubayreer found evidence that the drow had suspected that a secret cabal of Netherese wizards had manipulated them into war with Teshar.

Three years later, in the Year of the Galloping Gorgon (503 DR), seven halfling scouts of the Akh'Velahrn (army of Cormanthyr) from Myth Drannor destroyed a large encampment of Moander's faithful near the ruins of his last temple and his entombed remains. While attempting to explore the ruins, they were driven off by the sudden appearance of several liches from the catacombs below.

In the Year of the Arcane Cabal (524 DR), Aubayreer Mindosel finally pieced together the role played by the Claws of Arlochar in the fall of Teshar and the location of the Catacombs of Claws from clues discovered in the Twisted Tower and old reports of the attack on Moander's followers. Aubayreer then led a raid by current and former apprentices of Mentor Wintercloak (including Arun's Son, the Nameless Chosen) into the catacombs in the depths of Moander's Crypt. In the end, Aubayreer's host proved victorious

following a great spell battle that culminated in the destruction of the Claws of Arlochar and broke the power of the cult of Myrkul in the Moonsea North for many centuries. However, the *Crown of Horns* remained hidden within the catacombs, still hidden from detection by the binding spells cast by the Fair Folk on the Jawed God. (This missed opportunity to have recovered the *crown of horns*, long before it afflicted Laeral Silverhand, was an enduring regret for Khelben in the last years of his life.)

Wearers of the Skull

In the Year of the Pillaged Crypt (1005 DR), a secretive cabal of necromancers, backed by the church of Myrkul, rediscovered the Citadel of Shadelorn and claimed it for their own. The Wearers of the Skull, as they took to calling themselves, quickly became a power in the Moonsea North rivaling that of the High Imperceptor of Bane and drawing the attention of the Those Who Harp.

After a series of initial skirmishes, escalating strife between the Harpers and the Myrkulytes culminated in the Year of Smoldering Spells (1020 DR) with an attack on the Citadel of Shadelorn by a Harper-led army that led to the destruction of the Wearers of the Skull. Khelben was one of the leaders of the attack and, during the subsequent sacking of the citadel, acquired many fell grimoires written by the Claws of Arlochar, held sacred by the Church of Myrkul. Infuriated, Myrkul's senior priests dispatched liches loyal to the Lord of Bones to destroy the upstart Harpers. Other powers in the North opened their eyes in amazement when lich after lich was destroyed by Those Who Harp throughout the long, hot summer of the Year of The Howling Axe (1021 DR). However, by then, the Harpers had drawn the attention of many evil brotherhoods, including the church of Bane, and they were forced to go into hiding when High Imperceptor Forja B'donder sent an army to destroy them.

Stronghold of the Nine

In the Year of the Singing Skull (1297 DR), while expanding his family's crypt beneath the city of Yûlash, Lord Andilvar Marqrest discovered the long-lost catacombs of the Claws of Arlochar. While exploring the depths of that ancient stronghold, he discovered the *Crown of Horns*, clutched in the grasp of a crawling claw, and claimed it for himself. Under the crown's malign influence, Lord Andilvar began to employ its powers to acquire the lordship of the city, beginning with the murder of the reigning lord.As Lord Andilvar increasingly relied on the powers of the *Crown of Horns* to gain advantage over his rivals, the influence of the maleficent artifact began to sow great discord amongst the noble houses of Yûlash.

In the Year of the Wandering Maiden (1337 DR), Aumvor the Undying, a Netherese lich familiar with the artifact's early history, deduced that the *Crown of Horns* had been rediscovered, by scrying on events in the far-off city of Yûlash. After secretly

The Citadel of Shadelorn

murdering Lord Andilvar Marqrest, Aumvor seized the *crown* for his own designs. Relieved of the artifact's corrupting influence, the nobles of Yûlash agreed soon thereafter to abolish the lordship and instead rule by council, but the danger posed to Faerûn by the crown continued unabated.

After returning to his lair, Aumvor hid the *Crown of Horns* in the Stronghold of the Nine, where his intended bride-to-be, Laeral Silverhand, would find it, masked by a simple illusion of an ugly iron helm. Aumvor viewed Laeral as prime breeding stock, due to the silver fire that coursed through her veins, once she had been transformed into lichdom. Aumvor, in his madness, hoped to spawn a race of "living" undead called deadspawn. Laeral did don the *Crown of Horns* later in the Year of the Wandering Maiden, as Aumvor hoped, and descended into madness. However, the Chosen of Mystra managed to resist the siren call of lichdom for many years, while Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun sought a way to free her from its grip.

After eighteen years of research, drawing on the texts he had recovered long ago in the Citadel of Shadelorn, Khelben Arunsun concluded that the secret to breaking the crown's hold might lie within the Catacombs of Claws. He finally reached the long-shielded reliquary of the crown in the Year of the Prince (1357 DR), after Moander the Jawed God was freed from his ancient prison and the ancient wards binding him were sundered. After battling Laeral along the length of the Unicorn Run, the Blackstaff managed to shatter the *Crown of Horns*, freeing Laeral from its grip. He then hid the fragments of the broken *Crown of Horns* in Blackstaff Tower, while nursing Laeral back to health.

Time of Troubles

In the Year of Shadows (1358 DR), following the Fall of the Gods, a great battle in Waterdeep led to the destruction of Myrkul's avatar. The Lord of Bones used his lingering power to send his mind toward the greatest remaining concentration of his power with reach. Given his proximity to Blackstaff Tower, his essence forced its way into Khelben's vault and possessed the shattered *Crown of Horns*, reforming it into a vessel for his remaining divinity, unrelated to the artifact of yore. Once the artifact in its new form was complete, Myrkul began to teleport the *Crown of Horns* to many places, using his hosts to create shadowrath servants.

Ritual of Ascension

Although Jergal had long conceded the manipulation of the Art as practiced by the Netherese to Issarnathass, in his guise as the Terraseer, and determined that the gems on which the Code of Reversion had been inscribed were forever lost, the Lord of the End of Everything never abandoned the original goal of the Ascension ritual that caused the Disjunction: to seize the mantle of divinity for the entire spell weaver race. As the years passed, although still a god, Jergal passed through each of the six stages of life of a spell weaver, moving ever closer to the end of his thirty-six-century life and his final act of regeneration.

Beginning in -939 DR, Jergal began preparations for a new form of the Ascension ritual that would culminate in his rebirth as six gods. As the spell weaver breeding vessels in the main pyramid of Ascore had been destroyed by the Disjunction, Jergal created a new version of the Ascension ritual in which he planned to transfer his memories, essence, and divine spark into six Netherese mortals, in effect creating six human gods with all the powers and memories of the spell weaver race.

Towards that end, the Lord of the End of Everything began identifying candidates among the Netherese archwizards that represented culmination of the original spell weaver breeding process. By the Year of Great Rains (-696 DR), Jergal had identified the infant Karsus as the planned focus of his refined Ascension ritual. Karsus demonstrated his potential quickly, creating the floating enclave of Eileanar by the Year of Dwarves Besieged (-674 DR) (and in the process drawing the attention of the Terraseer as well).

In the years that followed, Jergal began steering other candidates with great potential in the Art to serve Karsus as apprentices, including: Arlochar, Bale the Spellslayer, Elah Nydra, Nakasr, and one known only as Shadow. With the quiet aid of the Lord of the End of Everything, Karsus and his students grew rapidly in power, with the younger ones soon matching the prowess of Ioulaum.

In the Year of Turning Tides (-664 DR), having long forseen the threat posed by Karsus, Issarnathass, in his guise as the Terraseer, convinced the young archwizard to examine the remaining Nether Scrolls in search of additional insights in the fight against the phaerimm. However, the Lord of the End of Everything made sure Karsus never had the chance, directing his followers (priests in the Church of Jergal) to steal the artifacts while they were en route to Eileanar and then hide them beneath the pyramids of Ascore. As a result Karsus turned to other areas of inquiry shaped directly by Jergal's hidden hand and not that of the Terraseer.

By the Year of Sleeping Dragons (-408 DR), Karsus had uncovered the secrets of heavy magic, a crucial ingredient in Jergal's planned ritual, the first of Jergal's six candidates to do so. (In the process of experimenting with heavy magic, Karsus inadvertently slew a renegade arcanist named Wulgreth and transformed him into a lich.)

In the Year of Enchanters (-390 DR), Lord Shadow was apparently assassinated, but he secretly survived and resurfaced as Telamont Tanthul of Thultanthar (Shade), a disguise discerned only by Karsus, the Terraseer, and Jergal. With his new bride, Alashar Crywinds, Telamont continued his investigation of the Plane of Shadow and made plans to relocate there permanently.

By the Year of Good Courage (-345 DR), all six candidates could wield heavy magic, and Jergal's preparations were complete. During this period (-408 DR to -345 DR), the Terraseer, who had observed all six archwizards for many years, finally divined Jergal's intent. Arlochar, Bale the Spellslayer, Elah Nydra, Karsus, and Nakasr, who by then were all firmly under the control of Jergal, dismissed the Terraseer's discrete warnings. Only Telamont Tanthul took the Terraseer's adminitions seriously, prompting him to look at Jergal's aid with a jaundiced eye and focus more on his own interests in planar study.

In the Year of Sovereign Truth (-342 DR), Jergal exacted his final vengeance on his old foe, when the culmination of the Terraseer's plan to develop a new weapon against the phaerimm ended with the premature death of Shenandra, thanks to Jergal's machinations with the *Crown of Horns*. In the Year of Sundered Webs (-339 DR), all of Jergal's candidates assembled in Eileanar, with the exception of Telamont Tanthul, who heeded the Terraseer's warning and shifted Thultanthar to the Plane of Shadow on the eve of Karsus's ritual. Desperate to find a replacement, the Lord of the End of Everything cast about for a sixth candidate, settling on Mystra of the Seven Stars, an untrained Netherese peasant girl with great natural talent in the Art (unbeknownst to Jergal, secretly a Chosen of Mystryl).

With six candidates assembled, Karsus cast his final spell in the misguided belief that they could steal Mystryl's divinity and become gods. As Jergal had planned, *Karsus's avatar* spell actually triggered the revised Ascension Ritual, causing all magic except heavy magic to briefly cease functioning, allowing Jergal to dissolve himself into six divine sparks. Five of the candidates each grasped a divine spark, but Mystra had no knowledge of heavy magic, she could not claim her fraction of Jergal's divinity. In desperation, Mystra seized the divine essence of Mystryl, who had sacrificed herself to save the Weave. Mystra's actions, coupled with a sudden attack by a mindgnaw of phaerimm (lured there by the hidden hand of the Terraseer), disrupted the conclusion of the Ascension Ritual, immediately slaying Karsus, and leaving behind small sliver of Jergal as a divine being.

After thirty-six centuries of divinity, the Lord of the End of Everything had ensured his final legacy, who came to be known as the Seven Lost Gods: Karsus, Arlochar, Bale the Spellslayer, Mystra, Nakasr, Elah Nydra, and Jergal himself, much reduced in power. In the wake of Netheril's fall, the remnants of Jergal's divinity fragmented into rival sects, and his portfolios were claimed by the Dark Three.

Interlude: The Seven Sigils War

In many ways, the Shadowed Age of Netheril marked the pinnacle of Netherese mastery of the Art and the height of Netherese hubris. Overshadowed by Aumvor the Undying, Karsus, Ioulaum, Larloch, and Telamont Tanthul, the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz arguably endangered the empire of Netheril as much as any of their peers. The ruling arcanists of Rdiuz included one sorcerer-queen and six sorcerer-kings: Cathala "Cat" Akri, Glaeros Lhaerimm, Jathiman Arthopaar, Meigg Inzarath, Morden Tereshayn, Yurax Rasendol, and Urgund Mezeketh. For centuries, these seven ruling arcanists worked in harmony, bound together by the *Seal of Seven Sigils*, which tied their fates to one another and ensured the destruction of any one of them tempted to break ranks. At the height of their power, the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz commanded the plains between the Lodestar Mountains (Modern: Scimitar Spires) and the God's Legion Mountains (Modern: Desertsmouth Mountains), giving them control of a significant share of Low Netheril's resources and a powerful perch among the Tel Lorlgathen (the High Mages of Netheril).

As their power increased, the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz became increasingly arrogant, crafting items of great power with increasing recklessness. Whereas the leaders of other floating Netherese enclaves sought to explore the rest of Faerûn, other worlds, or new forms of magic, the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz considered themselves the equal of the gods and sought to prove as much. Toward that end, the seven arcanists sought to study the nature of dead gods and the vestigial power they retained. In their hubris, they planned to conquer a swath of the Outlands, creating a base from which they could study the dead gods of the Astral Plane via a two-way color pool under their control. Eventually, they intended to bring the entire enclave of Rdiuz to the Outlands, positioning themselves to invade any of the other godly domain they might choose.

The first step in this ambitious plan was the construction of a massive portal from the Godswater Ravine (which held the slowly shrinking Wolfsberg River) to the Outlands, big enough to march an army or fly an enclave through. Cathala led this part of the project, erecting two towering pillars some one hundred fifty feet in height and fifty feet apart that came to be known as Cat's Gate. Three sides of each pillar rose vertically, while the fourth sloped away like the side of a pyramid. Both pillars were decorated with huge bas-reliefs of Cathala's favorite minions: lions, tigers, leopards, panthers, and other, more magical great cats. The second step of the plan, led by Meigg, involved the construction of the floating citadel of Meigg, a rock crag bristling with engines of war, girded by mighty battlements and shod in plates of rare, spell-reflecting metal. The Netherese planned to use Meigg's citadel as to secure a beachhead in the Outlands before bringing the entire floating city of Rdiuz to the Outer Planes. The third and final step of the plan involved marching an army into the Outlands to seize control of a two-way color pool and create a secure base from which to dominate the surrounding territory.

The symbol of the enclave of Rdiuz

In the Year of Endless Song (-489 DR), Cathala and Urgund led an army of werepanther warriors (who came to be known as the Akri) through Cat's Gate into the Outlands. Initially, their arrival was unchallenged, as the citadel of Meigg floated above the great valley into which they arrived. However, soon they found themselves fighting a war on two fronts. First, they came into increasing conflict with mercenary bands of yugoloths from the portal town of Hopeless. Second, their initial forays into the Astral Plane drew the attention of Anubis, Guardian of the Dead Gods. After the Netherese dared to steal fragments of the corpse of a dead god drifting in the Astral Plane and bring it back to Meigg for study, Anubis reacted in a fury. The Hound of the Dead, as he was also known, mustered an army of rilmani in the form of jackal-headed warriors to recover the remains he had pledged to guard.

By the Year of Closed Gates (-483 DR), the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz were in full retreat, beset by twin armies of rilmani and yugoloths. Meigg lay in ruins in the Outlands,and only a small fraction of the Akri survived the return to Prime Material Plane. In their wake, an army of rilmani poured into Netheril, seeking the purloined fragments of the shattered corpse of the dead god. By inundating the gate terminus in radiant waters from a shattered color pool, they were able to bypass the Netherese *portal* key. In desperation, Cathala led her fellow arcanists in a great ritual that sealed Cat's Gate, cutting off the rilmani army from the Outlands. The closing of the *portal* provided only a brief respite, for the cut-off rilmani army continued to fight against the Netherese for many years. Then, in the Year of Glowing Embers (-475 DR), Anubis reopened a long-sealed color pool to the north, in the heart of an ancient caldera (Modern: Colored Waters) opening a second front in the Seven Sigils War. The second rilmani army erupted

from the sable-colored silt, forming an amber-hued cinder cone and five scimitar-shaped *pools of radiance* in their wake.

The Cat's Gate

While their armies battled the immortal invaders on the plane below the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz retreated to their floating citadel to regroup and determine a new course of action. Foreseeing their eventual defeat, Morden and Yurax consulted the Second Imaskarcana—a prized gauntlet which held a great deal of Imaskari lore about the nature of divine beings and how to battle them that the Crown-Sorcerers had recovered ere the founding of Rdiuz. That artifact included a discourse by the artificers of fallen Imaskar of an experiment in the wilds north of the Moonsea that ended up releasing two primordials into the Realms: Borem of the Lake of Boiling Mud and Camnod the Unseen. In the Year of Dawning Magic (-449 DR), the two sorcerer-kings then led an expedition north to the Monument of the Ancients, a broad ziggurat hidden within the western reaches of the Frozen Forest built by a lost civilization of humans dating back to the First Flowering. There they damaged the Anchor of Chaos, freeing a third ancient primordial known as Maram of the Great Spear. Bound by the spells of the Netherese, Maram brought forth an army of elemental creatures and slaves and marched south and west to attack the rilmani armies.

While Morden and Yurax were consumed with recruiting Maram and his army, Jathiman set about creating a method to kill gods and seize their power, both in order to kill Anubis and in preparation for the planned conquest of the planes. By studying the fragments of the dead god that had been seized, Jathiman was able to deduce how such divine entities might be slain. Under Jathiman's leadership, each of the seven crown-sorcerers then founded a cult among populace of Rdiuz designed to worship them. In the Year of Chilling Laughter (-439 DR) the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz used this nascent worship, combined with the fragments of the dead god they had recovered, to create the god-killing *seven daggers of Rdiuz*. It was at this point that Jergal, the Lord of the End of Everything intervened, concerned that the Crown-Sorcerers might interfere with his plans for the revised Ascension ritual. Under cover of darkness in the Year of Dripping Daggers (-438 DR), the Pitiless One stole the *seven daggers of Rdiuz* and murdered all the cultists, transforming them into ravenous ghouls.

Undeterred by the death of their subjects, the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz continued their quest to master the gods, proving their preeminence once and for all. Using knowledge contained within the *Second Imaskarcana*, Glaeros set about reconstructing an artifact he knew only as the *shattered scepter of Imaskar*. After many years of searching, the sorcerer-king was able to recover all its constituent pieces, which had been scattered across Faerûn after Imaskari artificers succeeded in creating a divine barrier to the Mulhorandi pantheon in -4366 DR. In the Year of the Shattering (-374 DR), Glaeros began to reconstruct the *shattered scepter* in a grim process that drained the lives of a dozen apprentices. Noting his ambition, the Netherese deities sent divine minions to stop him, but all were destroyed by the other six crown-sorcerers. Finally, as Glaeros began the final stages of his scepter-crafting, several divine minions broke through his allies' defenses and destroyed him. The unfinished scepter, which Glaeros had begun to call the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings*, was then snatched up by Urgund, who used it to escape the fray and flee by means of a Netherese portal network to the isolated outpost of Blister in the northern Thunder Peaks and from there to an isolated *mishkella* (Netherese for "sphere outpost," from which Netherese diviners scryed on southern Cormanthyr) on the southern shore of the Sea of Fallen Stars (Modern: Saerloon).

In the wake of Glaeros's death and Urgund's disappearance, the five remaining Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz looked out and saw everything they had worked for was in ruins. Humbled at last before the gods, they sued for peace in the Year of Bruins (-371 DR). Anubis's rilmani generals agreed to withdraw from the Material Plane in exchange for the remaining abducted fragments of the dead god, while the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz set about banishing the remaining elementals in their service. In the end, only Maram of the Great Spear escaped the Netherese net, fleeing north and east to the lands north of the Moonsea (drawn by some unconscious tie to the Monument of the Ancients).

Rise of the Dark Three

Jergal, the Lord of the End of Everything, has always been a deity of unending, interwoven plans and contingencies. Even as he worked toward implementing the revised Ascension ritual and being reborn as six deities, Jergal's manipulation of those around him never ceased. During the Seven Sigils War, two humans drew his attention as future servants should there be a need. The first was a human slave warrior in the service of Maram whose skill and prowess was so puissant that he was known as the "Bane of the Ancients" on the world of Abeir. The second was Arabhal, who served the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz as chief assassin and spymaster. The duo were tasked with scouting the rilmani armies periodically to gain intelligence and soon formed an alliance of sorts based on mutual regard for their respective skills and ruthlessness.

In the wake of the Seven Sigils War, Netheril continued its gradual collapse, beset by the *lifedrain* spells of the phaerimm. Many Netherese fled the spreading sands, as part of an escalating diaspora into surrounding lands. Among their number were the duo who came to be known as Bane and Bhaal in the lands beyond

Netheril. In the Year of the Seven Tines (-365 DR), the pair began to experience a series of visions (given unto them in the form of restless nightmares while they slept by Jergal). These nightmares revealed clues to the location of seven iron daggers scattered across Faerûn. The two saw visions of themselves gathering up the weapons to slaughter three primordials: Borem of the Lake of Boiling Mud, Camnod the Unseen, and Maram of the Great Spear. The Lord of the End of Everything perceived the unleashed primordials as a potential threat to his revised Ascension ritual, and he saw Bane and Bhaal as agents to eliminate that concern.

Rilmani warrior of Anubis

Using the clues revealed to them by Jergal in their dreams, Bane and Bhaal made their way to a tiny island off the south coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars (Modern: Mezeketh Isle off the coast of Saerloon), where Urgund had taken refuge nearly a decade before built himself a tower through mighty workings of the Art. Since his arrival, the sorcerer-king had become a lich and reclaimed the *Jathiman dagger*, while still holding the Glaeros's unfinished scepter, now known as the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings*. As Bane and Bhaal scouted the Tower of Mezeketh in the Year of Boiling Mud (-359 DR), they encountered Myrkul Bey al-Kursi, Crown Prince of Murghom, who had left his homeland years prior seeking to attain the power that the throne of a vassal state of Mulhorand could not provide. The trio, who came to be known as the Dark Three, agreed to work together to defeat Mezeketh, which they did through a potent combination of clandestine investigation, brute force, and powerful magic, leaving his tower in ruins. Myrkul then claimed the scepter of the sorcerer-kings, while Bane and Bhaal claimed Urgund's phylactery and the *Jathiman dagger*.

Soon thereafter, the Dark Three appeared in the court of Kisonraathiisar of Okloroum (Modern: Westgate) bearing the *Jathiman dagger*. In exchange for safe passage through the topaz dragon's demesne, the trio offered to slay Borem of the Lake of Boiling Mud on the fetid fields of Rezamark (Modern: the Redwater) and bear away his heart. With Kisonraathiisar's blessing, the trio slew the primordial, absorbing a portion of his power. They then sailed back north to Mezeketh. They buried *Borem's quagheart* beneath the ruins of the Tower of Mezeketh with the *Jathiman dagger* firmly embedded, leaving only a carved menhir to mark their victory.

In the Year of Shuddering Mythals (-358 DR), Jergal's nightmarish visions sent the Dark Three westwards to the ruins of Myth Rhynn in the Wealdath (also known as the Forest of Tethir). There the trio recovered the second of the *seven daggers of Rdiuz* from an ancient tomb guarded by an ancient baelnorn of Keltormir. The Dark Three headed north and east, on the trail of Camnod the Unseen. They tracked down the elusive primordial on the windswept plains of the Ride, north of the Moonsea, where he was worshiped as a wind god by the Horse Nomads of the Golden Steppes. With the *Morden dagger* embedded in Camnod's heart, the Dark Three then absorbed a portion of his power before interring the fallen primordial beneath the tallest peak of the Zef Mountains, at the western end of the Ride.

The next primordial to be targeted by the Dark Three was Maram of the Great Spear, but this time the trio did so without recovering another of the *seven daggers of Rdiuz* (even though Jergal had revealed the location of the *Yurak dagger* in a dream). After fleeing the banishment spells of the remaining crown-sorcerers at the end of the Seven Sigils War, Maram had cut a swath of destruction through the heart of the great Rystall Wood. He had then joined Camnod in posing as a god to the Horse Nomads of the Golden Steppes. In the Year of Sycophants (-357 DR), rather than lose track of the primordial whose spear embodied the axis around which Abeir and Toril rotated, the Dark Three mustered an unlikely coalition of Horreb artificers, war wizards of Barze, Horse Nomads of the Varm tribe, gnoll warriors from Frozen Flindyke, gnome hammers from Forharn, and others as well. Under the icy boughs of the Frozen Forest, Jergal's emissaries spent the lives of countless warriors to cleave a path to the Monument of Ancients.

Without one of the *seven daggers of Rdiuz* in hand, the sacrifice of countless lives might have come to naught, but Myrkul managed to use the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* to banish Maram back to the Elemental Plane of Earth, giving Bane time to reseal the Anchor of Chaos, and all three members of the trio time to absorb a portion of Maram's power. In the wake of the War of the Great Spear, the alliance broke up and the various members marched for home, greatly reduced in number and suffering from wounds that magic could not heal. Jergal returned his attention to his upcoming revised Ascension ritual, manipulating his chosen candidates for that ritual to explore the art of *heavy magic* content that the threat from the three primordials had been contained. With Jergal's

nightmarish visions suddenly absent, the Dark Three began to chart their own course, consumed with the idea of becoming gods themselves. They did not march with their nominal allies, electing instead to remain at the Monument of the Ancients. While the trio claimed they were studying the Anchor of Chaos in hopes of safeguarding the region from future releases of primordials, in truth they remained behind to release additional primordials and claim their power for themselves.

With Jergal's attention diverted, Myrkul constructed the Cenotaph of the Lost Gods, in the empty wastes of Lee-wai (Modern: Tortured Lands) as a vessel to hold the trio's purloined power. On the darkened obelisk, the fallen crown prince of Murghom inscribed the name of seven primordials the Dark Three had mastered or intended to master: Borem of the Lake of Boiling Mud, Camnod the Unseen, Edranka of the Smoldering Haze, Hargut the Gray Pestilence, Maram of the Great Spear, Torath of the Obsidian Vault, and Tyranthraxus the Flamed One. First, the trio tried to release Hargut the Gray Pestilence, but he had escaped the Anchor of Chaos long ago by fleeing to the Far Realm. Undeterred, the trio then went on to free Tyranthraxus, Edranka, and finally Torath. From each primordial the Dark Three extracted a fraction of their power before unleashing them into the Realms. Myrkul had detected a tenuous link between Hargut and a single worshiper in the eastern Moonsea region, so the trio hoped to induce that worshiper to call on Hargut through a campaign of primordial-led destruction throughout the region.

The next six years were a period of darkness and chaos in lands north of the Moonsea, thanks to the primordials unleashed by the Dark Three. In the Year of Stale Ale (-356 DR), bound to the will of the trio, Tyranthraxus raised an army of the Twisted Ones (fomorian giants), unleashing the horde upon the kingdom of Barze and leaving it a smoldering ruin. Conscripting the surviving warriors of Barze, over the next five years Tyranthraxus then led his combined forces into battle against the artificers of Horreb (on the shores of Lake Longreach) and the horse nomads of the Vane tribe (who laid claim to the open grasslands of the Ride). The Flaming One's reign of terror did not end until his defeat and imprisonment in Lake Longreach by Baron Schodt of Castle Vathar, last of the Horreb artificers. During the same period, Torath, under the yoke of the Dark Three, burrowed into the depths under Mount Throndor in the Eastern Dragonspine Mountains (Modern: West Galena Mountains). From there he marched south and east in the Year of Dark Roads (-351 DR), leading an army of kuo-toa from Sorath-Nu-Sum to conquer the isolated duergar settlements amongst the Lost Ways of Sarphil (Modern: Beneath Mulmaster) until he was felled by a covey of night hags who forced him into icy cold water, transforming him into a flame-tinged pillar of stone (Modern: Pillar of Fire). Finally, during the same six years, Edranka, driven by the trio's desires, assembled the goblin tribes of the Tortured Lands into a massive horde. In the Year of Craven Words (-350 DR), she led them into battle on the blood-soaked fields of Grong-Haap only to be swept away by Hargut the Gray Pestilence, summoned by Hask, the greathorn minotaur ruler of Ironfang Keep. Beneath the chilled waters of the eastern Moonsea, Erdranka was eventually imprisoned within sphere of ice tethered to the floor of the Moonsea by the sea elves of Aluteumarel.

In addition to unleashing chaos and misery, the Dark Three's primordial-led wave of destruction succeeded in calling forth Hargut the Grey Pestilence from the Far Realm, where he had escaped the trio's grasp. In the wake of his victory over Edranka's goblinoid armies, Haask returned triumphantly to the keep to feast and rest. Inside, the priest-king was stunned to discover two grim looking humans — Bane and Myrkul—sitting nonchalantly upon his giant-crafted throne. Before Haask could react, Bhaal appeared behind the priest-king, driving the *Yurax dagger* — procured from Darkhold in the Sunset Mountains — through his back and into his heart. As his life energy pumped into the enchanted dagger, Haask's form began to shift revealing his true nature as a batrachi-doppelganger. Producing the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings*, Myrkul pointed the artifact first at Hargut then to Haask while speaking three arcane syllables. Great was roar of the Gray Pestilence as he was forcibly dragged down toward the fallen doppelganger. When at last they met, the two became one, and Haask, Voice of Hargut was reborn. Grong-Haap soon collapsed, and for a time Ironfang Keep again fell out of memory. Combined with the fall of Barze and Horreb, the eastern Moonsea lay in ruins.

Having acquired fragments of power from all seven primordials and seized a collection of lore from Haask, the Dark Three exited Ironfang Keep, heading up the Wyrmflow (Modern: White River) toward the Glacier of the White Wyrm. In the Year of Bold Poachers (-349 DR), thanks to Haask's trove of ancient knowledge, the trio uncovered Careekar, a batrachi stronghold which had been buried beneath the ice for millennia. The Dark Three discovered that the sprawling complex contained the secret of a great portal nexus dating back to the height of the batrachi empire of Boitumelo and set about trying to unlock it.

After a decade of investigation, the three (primarily Myrkul) finally succeeded in reopening the portal nexus — known to the batrachi as *Garuut-Omrum* — in the Year of Sundered Webs (-339 DR). At the moment of Karsus's Folly, the shattering of the Weave unlocked the tripartite portal's ancient batrachi seal. As a result, three smooth pyramids—each ninety feet at the base and 120 feet high—abruptly appeared across the North: *Garuut-Ar* at the mouth of the River Stojenaw (Modern: Sorcerer's Isle in Phlan), *Garuut-Au* in the caverns beneath Ironfang Keep (which predated the structure built by the fire giants of Helligheim), and *Garuut-Cu* covered by the ice of the Great Glacier (Modern: caverns beneath Castle Perilous in Vaasa).

After several years of study and experimentation, the Dark Three split up: Bane to *Garuut-Ar*, Bhaal to *Garuut-Au*, and Myrkul to *Garuut-Cu*. Then, in the Year of Seven Spirits (-335 DR), drawing forth the primordial power they had invested in the Cenotaph of the Lost Gods, the trio traveled to Jergal's Court of Bone using the power of the *Garuut-Omrum*. (Myrkul's *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* could not travel beyond the Material plane and was unintentionally left behind.) After battling through armies of skeletons, legions of zombies, a host of incorporeal undead, and a gauntlet of liches, Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul found the Lord of the End of Everything, apparently despondent, slumped in his Bone Throne. Before the Dark Three could attack, Jergal rose from his throne and offered it to them, but first he asked who among them should rule. The trio fell to fighting, each seeking the mantle of divinity. Eventually, Jergal grew bored and suggested they bowl for it, with the crown passing to whomever could roll a lich's head the farthest.

At this point Malar arrived and chased off after the skulls, intent on gaining his own place in the contest. While the Beastlord was gone, Jergal suggested the three ascendant mortals play a game of knucklebones. Bane won the game and chose to rule the living as a tyrant, beginning with the seven primordials. Myrkul came in second and chose to command both Jergal and the dead, with the except of the lich Urgund Mezeketh, who was bound to serve Bane as his seneschal and first banelich. And Bhall, while coming in third of the Dark Three, balanced the other two on a knife's edge,

claiming the instance of death and the transition between their two domainsAnd so it was that Jergal, Lord of the End of Everything, surrendered much of his divinity to the Dark Three. But this simply marked the start of his new plan, set to unfold over the next 3,600 years.

Scepter of the Sorcerer-Kings

Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement) (Destroyed)

This seemingly innocuous scepter was fashioned of blueshine mithral and some two feet in length. One end of it was capped by a hollow circlet while two curved horns projected from the other end. Some descriptions suggest the haft was studded with seven jewels: amber, fiery red, jet black, reddish-black, smokey dark gray, swirling light gray, and transparent. The scepter had the size and heft of a heavy mace, but the current composition of its components is currently unknown.

The Scepter of the Sorcerer-Kings

Although currently shattered and lost, the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* is an ancient artifact first forged by the artificers of ancient Imaskar and then reforged by a Netherese sorcerer-king. Also known as the *scepter of Khotan* and the *shattered scepter of Imaskar*, it has the power to banish the influence of the gods, making it an object of fear and loathing to the gods of Toril whilst coveted by the primordials of Abeir.

Lore: The *scepter of Khotan* was first forged during the reign of Lord Artificer Khotan of Imaskar as part of the effort to abduct tens of thousands of humans from another world whose people had no command of the Art. In -4366 DR, as Imaskari artifcers opened twin *portals* to that world, Lord Artificer Khotan employed the *scepter* to create a planar barrier to prevent contact between the newly acquired slaves and their deities. In so doing, he barred what came to be known as the Mulhorandi and Untheric pantheons from extending their reach into Realmspace, at least until they learned how to partially bypass the planar barrier. As the casting of the divine barrier approached its conclusion, the opening of the *portal* drew the attention of Ptah, one of the deities of that world. Unbeknownst to the Imaskari, the Opener of the Ways placed an avatar among the abducted humans as they passed through the *portal* to Toril. After a climactic fight with the revealed avatar of a furious god, Lord Artificer Khotan managed to fatally stab him with the *scepter*, killing Ptah's avatar and causing the *scepter* to shatter, scattering its constituent pieces across Faerûn.

Lord Khotan's scepter was thereafter known as the *shattered scepter of Imaskar*, and a possible way to reforge it, assuming it could be recovered, was recorded the *Second Imaskarcana*. Unbeknownst to the Imaskari, Ptah's brief appearance on Toril revealed to him where his world's people had been taken, and he eventually led manifestations of the gods of the Mulan to their new world via wildspace, bypassing the Imaskari divine barrier, with the aid of the *beacon of light*.

Centuries after the fall of Imaskar, the *Second Imaskarcana* was recovered by the Crown-Sorcerers of Rdiuz. Of their number, a sorcerer-king named Glaeros Lhaerimm, set about recovering the individual pieces of the broken artifact, a process he did not complete until the Year of Shattering (-374 DR). He then immediately began the effort to reconstruct the *scepter of sorcerer-kings*, as he renamed the artifact. He came close to succeeding, having restored all of the artifact except for embedding seven jewels in its haft, but divine minions of the Netherese gods broke through the ranks of his fellow crown-sorcerers and killed the arrogant sorcerer-king. Glaeros's unfinished *scepter* was seized by Urgund Mezeketh, a fellow sorcerer-king, who fled to the Tower of Mezekoth, an isolated island to the south along the northern shore of the Sea of Fallen Stars.

Urgund held the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* until the Year of Boiling Mud (-359 DR), when it was seized by Myrkul Bey al-Kursi, Crown Prince of Murghom, a necromancer who was part of a band that came to be known as the Dark Three. Myrkul, the future Lord of the Dead, continued Glaeros's work, adding a single gem to the haft each time the trio absorbed the power of another primordial (a group eventually and somewhat confusingly known as the Seven Lost Gods). Myrkul is known to have used the *scepter* at least twice, once to banish Maram of the Great Spear back to the Elemental Plane of Earth at the Monument of Ancients in the Year of Sycophants (-357 DR), and once to compel Hargut the Gray Pestilence to merge with Haask, the Voice of Hargut, in the Year of Craven Words (350 DR). Myrkul lost the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* after the Dark Three employed a portal nexus — known to the batrachi as *Garuut-Omrum* — to reach the Bone Throne of Jergal.

Unable to leave the plane in which it was created, the *scepter* instead teleported half a world away to the region now known as the Border Kingdoms. In the Year of the Ruling Scepter (-278 DR), the arcanist Halaratanthyria discovered it in the wilds of the Qurth Forest and brought it back to Halar's Halls, her keep west of the woodlands.

Halartanthyria had made her home there after the Netherese skyship she was travelling in as a child was forced to land after its magics failed en route to lands further south. Carefully experimenting with the artifact and seeking to understand its powers, Halartanthyria was suddenly assailed by Maerklos "Stormherald", the first and greatest warrior-priest of unified Talassan church, who seized the Scepter hoping to wield it against the enemies of his deity. In that battle Halartanthyria met her doom and much of her keep was thrown into ruin, while her desperate use of the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* stymied the powers of the deities Jergal, Garagos and Felidae of the Beast Cults (a goddess long since subsumed by the deity Sharess) for a time and made her ruined keep a haunted place known to the modern Realms as Godswalk Keep.

It is known that Maerklos carried away the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* at the behest of Talos but what he did with it and where it was taken to are unknown. Maerklos himself is known to have travelled east, plundering and pillaging in the name of the

Destroyer. The last recorded sighting of him was on the slopes of Mount Andrus, amidst the range of peaks in the northeastern Orsraun Mountains known as the Alaoreaum. The "Rending Storm" met his doom in battle with Gorthalylaug, at the time a mature adult red dragon, who laired amidst the heart of the semi-active volcano. In the wake of his victory, Gorthalylaug claimed the title of "Stormcrossing," and the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* was among the treasures he took for his hoard.

In the Year of the Raised Banner (227 DR), Gorthalylaug, by then a very old red dragon, met his doom during a rash attack on the Stout Folk of Deepgate that engulfed the dwarven city in a great conflagration. In the wake of the dragon's demise, Arcrown Valdyr Showaxe, Lord of Ironfang Deep, led an expedition into the depths of Mount Andrus to claim the dragon's hoard for his own, but the *scepter* was not among the treasures claimed by the dwarves.

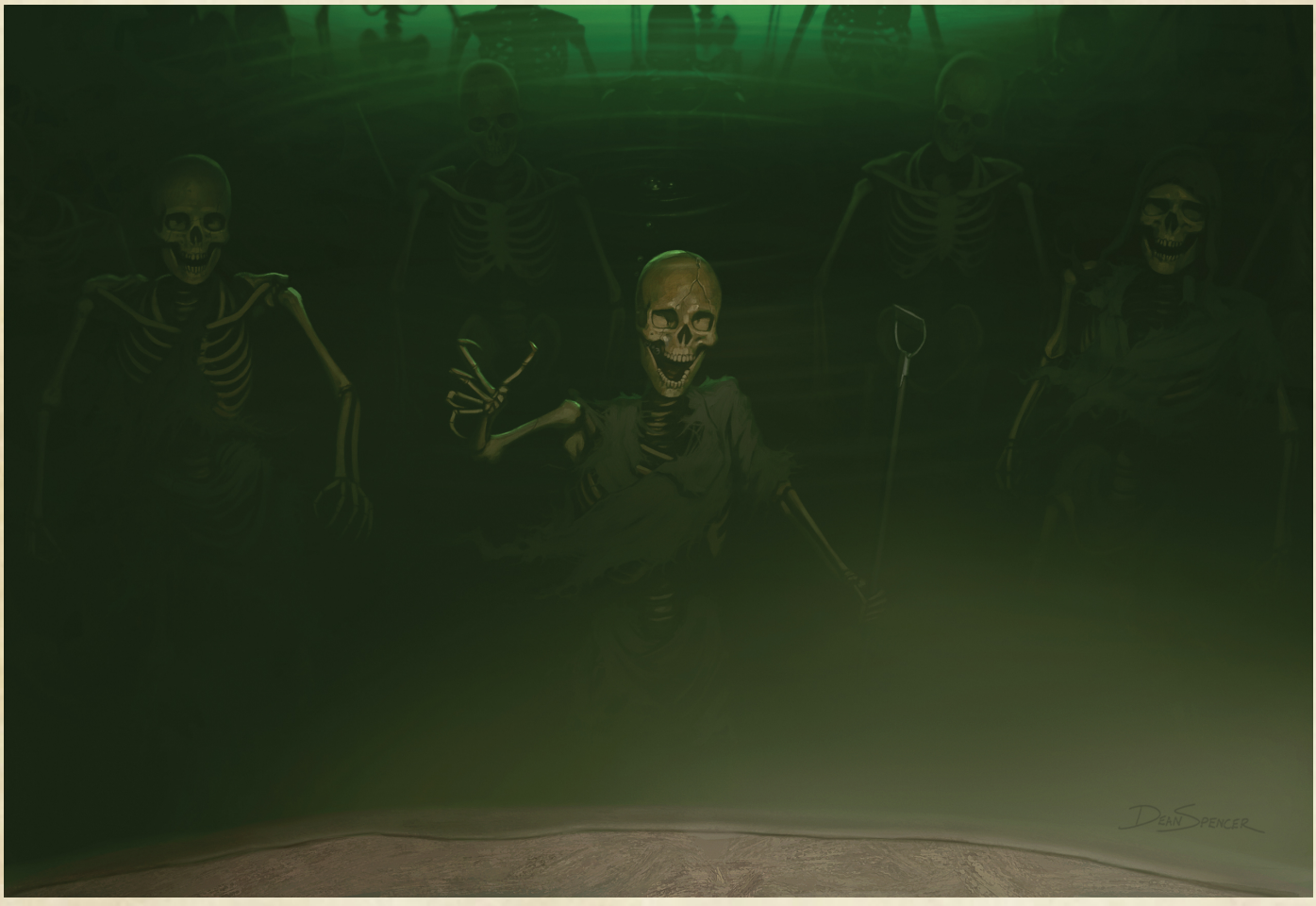
In the harsh winter in the Year of the Oaken Glade (517 DR), the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* reappeared on the slopes of Mount Andrus in the wake of that volcano's eruption. It lay there, half-embedded in cooled lava, for many years until the Year of the Shattered Scepter (614 DR), when it was discovered by pureblood yuan-ti of House Extaminos spying on a Talassan ritual near the volcano's peak. The Extaminaar spy brought the *scepter* back to Hlondeth, where, as it happened, Hlondeth was in mid-rebellion from Chondath. During the chaos of the Battle of Seven Heads, the ancient artifact was hidden away and forgotten before the yuan-ti took the time to investigate its powers.

The *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* reappeared in the Year of the Pillaged Crypt (1005 DR), when Dragon Cultists of the Wyrmserpent's Coil in Hlondeth recovered it while raiding a crypt deep beneath House Extaminos. The Followers of the Scaly Way planned to bequeath the *scepter* to Eibranrath, a female ancient black dragon of the Wetwoods, who they had long sought to convince to embrace dracolichdom. However, the abrupt death without an heir of Lord Wariton Minlow in the Year of Smoldering Spells (1020 DR) allowed House Extaminos to seize power, and they quickly exterminated the Followers of the Scaly Way in Hlondeth.

In the same year, far to the north, Thavverdasz, a member of the Myrkul-worshiping Wearers of the Skull, fled into exile after a Harper-led army attacked the Citadel of Shadelorn, destroying the cabal of necromancers resident there. The renegade necromancer fled south to the Vast Swamp, along the border of Cormyr and Sembia, where he established a lair amidst the ruins of Orva.

In the Year of Crimson Magics (1026 DR), Thavverdasz was approached by the Wearers of the Purple in the Sembian Dragon Cult cell. In exchange for recovering the Dragon Cult's lost treasures hidden in underways beneath Hlondeth, the Followers of the Scaly Way promised the necromancer first pick from the assembled hoard. Unlike the previous hirelings dispatched by the Cult , Thavverdasz was successful, and he claimed the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* as his reward, while reluctantly parting with the *jewels of Okloroum*. This expedition marked the beginning of a loose alliance between Thavverdasz and the Dragon Cult.

By the Year of the Thunder's Child (1069 DR), Thavverdasz had achieved lichdom, following ancient rituals laid down centuries before by the Claws of Arlochar. However, in so doing he tainted his phylactery with the waters of Minauros — ruled by Mammon, the Lord of Avarice — infecting his very being with unquenchable avarice.



Undead Harpers rise to attack

In the Year of Prideful Tales (1219 DR), Thavverdasz was approached by Rundorl Moonsklan, then the leader of the Harpers in the Dragonreach Lands who dreamed of becoming the Harper King. Having secretly initiated a clandestine war with the Red Wizards of Thay after forging a pact with Szass Tam, Zulkir of Necromancy, Rundorl was looking for a way to divert a growing army of undead (built of slain Harpers) sent by the treacherous Szass Tam who were all too familiar with Harper ways and strongholds. In desperation, Rundorl went to the Lord of the Sinking City to bargain, promising the unwitting service of the Harpers (and all the magic they had seized from the Red Wizards and brought back from Thay) in return for the lich's aid in intercepting the undead Harpers and wresting control of them away from Szass Tam. Intrigued, Thavverdasz agreed, hoping to add the Harpers to his ranks of servitors along with the Dragon Cult. Taking over Rundorl's mind, Thavverdasz was amused by Rundorl's dreams of becoming a Harper King, and he assumed that title himself, before transforming the foolish bard into another undead servitor. The Lord of the Sinking City then quickly seized control of Szass Tam's army of undead Harpers and set about tracking down the still living ones.

In the Year of the Horn (1222 DR), Thavverdasz's plots came unwound due to his unquenchable greed. Coveting the jewels of Okloroum (which the Dragon Cult was ferrying north as tribute to Khalahmongre, an ancient blue dracolich who dwelled in the Desertsmouth Mountains west of Shadow Gap), Thavverdasz treacherously attacked his nominal allies as they passed through Thunder Gap and seized the gemstones for himself.

In response, the Wearers of the Purple in Sembia reacted in a fury, dispatching an army of Dragon Cultists to beard the self-styled Harper King in his lair. The Followers of the Scaly Way drove the surviving Harpers back almost to the Court of the Harper King and seemed assured of victory over Those Who Harp. However, Szass Tam, who had been patiently biding his time to exact his revenge against Thavverdasz for seizing control of his undead Harper army, chose that moment to strike as well. With the battle raging between Harpers and Dragon Cultists in the swamp outside, Szass Tam suddenly appeared in the Court and confronted Thavverdasz in his Great Spellchamber. The two liches hurled spells at each other, but the clever defenses set in place by Thavverdasz against any invasion of his Court diverted the magical attacks on him out into the swamp — destroying most of the Cult and Harper forces.

Thavverdasz's own spells did far more damage to his Court, for they were cast at a foe who was not really present. Szass Tam had perfected a magical image of himself that could cast spells and that had physical presence, but whose mind was elsewhere. Oblivious to pain or attempts to control its senses, this image was unaffected by the other lich's spells until Thavverdasz destroyed it with the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings*. Back in Thay, the artifact's force drove Szass Tam's senses from him, for he held within him a divine spark derived from some of the *khaledshran*, an elixir derived from the precious divine blood of the dead deity Re. It was many years before the great Red Wizard recovered. Meanwhile, Thavverdasz stood in triumph over his fallen foe. By means of his magic he saw that the decimated ranks of the Cult of the Dragon were in full flight, outside. Picking up the skull of a Harper he had slain long ago, he told it proudly that victory was his now, and the rule of the Harper King secure. "On the contrary," the skull told him, "your troubles have just begun—but they'll end soon enough." Then it twisted in his hand into the features of Elminster, and exploded, shattering the lich. By the time Elminster arrived in person at the Court of the Harper King, the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* had vanished, borne back to the Catacombs of Ordulin, a hidden Harper vault deep beneath that city, by the sole surviving Harper to have witnessed its use.

The *scepter* lay hidden beneath Ordulin for more than a century, until Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun removed it from the Harper vault in which it lay in the Year of the Prince (1357 DR). In the guise of a mysterious merchant-mage, Khelben employed the *scepter* in Sembia to fight free of an attack by Red Wizards of Thay dispatched by Szass Tam (who had long-lasting tracer spells set to alert him whenever the *scepter* next reappeared). Defeating the overmatched Red Wizards, Khelben took the *scepter* to the mountains north of Whitehorn in the Moonsea, where he is believed to have conversed with the remnants of Camnod the Unseen, one of the primordial members of the original Seven Lost Gods and from him learned secrets of the deity Bane. The Blackstaff then hid the *scepter* amidst a ruin in the Gulthmere Forest reachable by a portal from Whitehorn (north of the Moonsea).

Years later, as he embarked upon personal, secret designs, Khelben deliberately revealed the location of the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings* to the Zhentarim by leaving a trail to Whitehorn and from there to the Gulthmere Forest for the Zhentarim to easily follow. As Khelben had planned, the scepter of the sorcerer-kings was recovered by Zhentarim agents and passed into the hands of Fzoul Chembryl, Hand of the Baneson and Chosen Tyrant of Iyachtu Xvim, in the month of Hammer. Within a month, Fzoul had employed the *scepter* to stab the banelich Faram Khaldan in the chest, causing an explosion that shattered the temple of Xvim and imbued Fzoul with great power. Coming into direct contact with the sliver of divinity contained within the banelich, the *scepter* was shattered into five pieces which disappeared, believed scattered across Faerûn. To this day, no one has located any of the pieces of the *scepter of the sorcerer-kings*, although some sages and loremasters believe that if they were to be found, the *scepter* could be returned to its former power. Other sages believe that the *scepter* is destroyed forever and that the deities of Toril would actively work to prevent it ever being made whole again. Such a task would be one of legend, and, as with all such endeavors, awaits the brave or the foolhardy in the years to come.

Effect: While shattered, the *scepter* has no known powers. Once reconstituted, albeit without any gems, the *scepter* is thought to be capable of expelling any divine being from the Realms (and barring them from interacting with the Realms for at least a tenday). With seven or more jewels, each holding a fragment of a divine spark or a primordial spark, embedded in the haft, it is possible to create a permanent divine barrier between the Realms and a pantheon of gods. Users of the *scepter* should be aware that the lesser powers of the artifact seem to vary each time it is reconstituted.

Destroying the Scepter: The scepter of the sorcerer-kings can only truly be destroyed by burying it in the Outlands. As there is no known way to remove the scepter from the Material Plane, it is unlikely the scepter can ever be destroyed.

This work is the result of endless debate and discussion between Eric L. Boyd and George Krashos. It was written by researching countless game products and novels, and trying to weave together many little tidbits of Realmslore. Thanks go to Ed Greenwood and all the other Realms authors for creating such a wonderful playground!

Design: Eric L. Boyd
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Layout: George Krashos
Artists/Art: DMs Guild Art Resources (Cover), Dean Spencer (Undead Harpers), Pixabay (Citadel of Shadelorn; Rilmani warrior), Stock Art (Cat's Gate; Jergal symbol; Rdiuz symbol; Scepter of the Sorcerer-Kings).

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